

The University of Chicago

A STUDY OF WILHELM LOEHE  
HIS COLONIES, AND THE LUTHERAN  
INDIAN MISSIONS IN THE SAGINAW  
VALLEY OF MICHIGAN

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1937

By  
HOMER REGINALD GREENHOLT

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## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872) and his numerous activities became the writer's object of interest as the result of translating a series of letters in a collection of Loehe's correspondence now in the possession of the University of Chicago. Continued investigation brought the conviction that Loehe was a Lutheran churchman whose contributions to his church were altogether too little known. From the large collection of Loehe's correspondence the writer singled out a particular group of letters which were made the basis of this study. In this group there are approximately seventy-five German letters, many of which assume the proportions of large and detailed reports. They deal with every aspect of the American work of Loehe's Nothelfer, relate the story of the formation and planting of his Franconian colonies in Michigan, discuss doctrinal issues, tell of the growth of communities and congregations, report of the labors of his missionaries sent to the American Indians and sketch his plans and projects for promoting the Lutheran church in America. As a complement to these valuable sources the author made use of Loehe's Kirchliche Mittheilungen, 1843-1866, consisting of twenty-four volumes in six bound volumes. These contain entire letters, extracts from letters and journals, missionary reports, travel adventures, Kirchenordnung, Instructions to Nothelfer, constitutions of ecclesiastical organizations and data of every sort necessary for an appreciation of the field work done by Loehe's men and colonies.

Loehe himself was a voluminous writer on matters pertaining to the Lutheran church and many of his works have been consulted including several volumes of his published sermons. Other helpful information was secured from histories of the German Lutheran congregations in the Franconian colonies.

Although the pastor of a small German parish in Bavaria, Loehe was among the outstanding preachers of his day; he was a diligent student of liturgies; he was endowed with remarkable ability as a pastor; he was a voluminous writer on ecclesiastical matters of every sort; he founded many institutions of mercy in his parish and a commendable number in America; he assisted scores of Nothelfer whom he had sent to the German Lutherans in America; he organized and directed colonies to Saginaw County, Michigan; he sponsored and promoted synodical organizations in America; he despatched and financed missions among the American Indians; and he was influential in the ecclesiastical circles of Germany

Loehe's interest in the religious plight of multitudes of Germans scattered over North America was aroused by Wyneken's Notruf (emergency call) which appeared in Germany in the early forties. It told how the German Lutherans living in the middle west of North America were either becoming members of the numerous "sects" or were being lost entirely to the church. When Wyneken, who had been located in a parish in Fort Wayne, Indiana, went back to Germany, 1841-1843, to represent the situation of the American Lutherans he visited pastor Loehe in Neuendettelsau believing that the latter was in a position to respond to his call for help. From these contacts Loehe derived his impulse to help the German Lutherans in America. However, the methods extending help were in part the result of reflecting upon his various problems, domestic and foreign and in part the product of circumstances.



Essentially Loehe was a man of many interests in so far as they were related to the church and his parish. Whether he dealt with matters, religious, national or social, he approached them from the point of view of a churchman. Stated more concretely he was an ultra-Lutheran who claimed that the Lutheran church was the purest particular church among the particular churches, such as the Reformed and the Roman Catholic. At a time when church union was widely discussed and even enforced by the state, he insisted that true church union had to be Lutheran-centered. The genuine Scriptural nature of the Lutheran confessions, he affirmed, gave the Lutheran church its priority of rank among the churches. Since, however, Lutheranism was not everywhere the same, he also believed in the superiority of the German Lutheran church to other Lutheran churches. For example, he contrasted the German Lutheran church with the American Lutheran to the disparagement of the latter. Again, the Bavarian Union was not to Loehe's liking and he contributed much toward bringing about its dissolution and the establishment of separate ecclesiastical organizations for the Lutherans and the Reformed. Of the numerous charitable and educational institutions which he founded or supported all were intended for German Lutherans only. There were, however, occasions when he thought in terms of an universal Lutheran church.

Along with his staunch adherence to the Lutheran church went a belief in the sole efficacy of the German language as an instrument for the maintenance and perpetuation of German culture and the Lutheran church. From all who were in any way indebted to him for guidance and support, he exacted a pledge to the perpetual use of the German tongue.

In his German environment Loene was not only affected by, but was also an active agent in, the Inner Mission movement. This

points to Loehe's positive social consciousness. For several decades foreign missionary societies had been springing up in Germany wherever they were not prohibited by the state. Loehe, however, was first attracted to the work of the Inner Mission. Later he attempted in self-justification to combine foreign missionary activities with those of the Inner Mission. It was in connection with his interest in the Inner Mission that his initial concern was aroused in the Germans who had emigrated to North America and had scattered themselves over its wide expanse of territory without having made any provision for spiritual care.

To promote the welfare of the Lutheran church among the Germans mentioned by Wyneken, Loehe hastily prepared Nothelfer or "emergency men" who in the beginning were instructed to perform the duties of school teaching both among the children and the parents of the German families. The Nothelfer, however, soon entered the ministry because the Germans in America were more favorably disposed toward the church. The German leaders were quick to object to Loehe's use of scantily educated men in the ministry but the latter met their arguments by asserting that "necessity knew no law." During the years of Loehe's active interest in America more than eighty men, whom he had dispatched as workers for the Lutheran church, accomplished much in the way of organizing congregations and in nurturing the spiritually destitute. Frequently the Nothelfer gave valuable encouragement to the young American institutions of learning by entering them for additional training. To the Seminary which he founded in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, in 1846, Loehe sent the first eleven students. Consistently Loehe sent books--one of the paramount needs of seminaries--with the Nothelfer to those schools which met his approval. Many of these students could never have pursued their studies with-



out the financial support which he advanced to them. Furthermore, he opened up to them access to those devoted Lutherans in the Fatherland who were willing to offer aid of any kind. These men, whom Loehe had indoctrinated and sent to minister to the spiritual needs of the Germans in North America, promoted assiduously a strict denominationalism and gave great impetus to the conservative reaction which had already manifested itself in the older Lutheran Synods. In every instance they opposed any so-called Lutherans who tolerated co-operation with non-Lutherans. Upon arrival in America they joined the already existent Lutheran synods in Ohio and Michigan only to withdraw shortly afterward in order to set up a more strictly confessional Lutheran synod, the Missouri Synod.

Wynken and the early Nothelfer made it clear to Loehe that a great need of the new congregations in America was some order of service which the inexperienced ministers could employ for guidance. Here was a challenge and Loehe to meet the need labored diligently and happily in the preparation of an Agende. While he early realized that the Agende might not be suited for all situations he looked forward to the day when the Lutheran form of worship represented in it should be the delight of the whole Lutheran church. It is admitted on all sides that Loehe's Agende was a guide in the recovery of the Lutheran ritual which culminated in the common Service. The authors of the Order of Service of the ministerium of Pennsylvania, 1860, acknowledged their indebtedness to Loehe's liturgical studies.

Stirred by reading accounts of injustices perpetrated upon the American Indians by the whites, and impelled by internal and external pressure to concern himself about the heathen, Loehe conceived the idea of combining the activities of the Inner Mission

among the Germans in America with those of a foreign mission to the American Indians. Out of this idea sprang Frankenmut, the first colony of Lutherans which he organized and sent to Saginaw county, in the state of Michigan, in 1845.

Frankenmut, which was intended to be a model German Lutheran community and a base for the activities of its missionary-pastor, August Craemer, while he labored among the Indians, had in respect to its missionary objective a brief career of but five years. At the very beginning of its existence in 1847 the Missouri synod sought control of the missions and Loehe made the transfer. During the period in which Frankenmut functioned as a mission its pastor baptized thirty or more Indian children and was instrumental in establishing a daughter station at Bethany, an Indian village, in Gratiot county, Michigan. On the other hand, pastor Craemer's plan to establish an English school in Frankenmut and to draw the Indian children to it for Christian instruction was impracticable. Epidemics of sickness, the migratory habits of the Indians, the tendency of many Indian children to resent discipline and return to their wild haunts, unsatisfactory interpreters, the great distances from the tribes to the school, the interference of Methodist missionaries, the intrigues of traders and the removal of the Indians by the government caused Frankenmut to abandon its missionary purpose in favor of the Bethany station.

A decade later for similar reasons the efforts put forth by the several missionaries at Bethany came to naught, if one were to conclude that helping several families to adopt a more settled life on farms or assisting the weak and needy was inconsequential. But rather than surrender their missionary purpose with undue haste the Lutherans followed the Indians to Isabella county, twenty-five miles to the north of Bethany where the government had induced the

Indians to take up land in severalty, and there they set up another mission at Mount Pleasant. With experiences strikingly like those encountered in the earlier missions and, by the missionaries of all denominations, the Missouri synod by 1869 had come to view Indian missions as hopeless and abandoned the work in Michigan. Loehe, however, upon relinquishing his projects in Michigan in 1853, transferred his colonization capital to the support of mission congregations and mission stations in Iowa.

Frankenmut was also the scene of Loehe's attempt to put into operation his grandiose colonisation scheme. To prevent the German Lutheran emigrants from scattering pell-mell over North America to the detriment of their Lutheran faith, Loehe proposed to gather those German Lutherans who were planning to emigrate, band them together with Lutheran pastors by means of Kirchenordnungen and despatch the colonies formed to settle in the neighborhood of Frankenmut. Perchance, Loehe conjectured, Michigan might even become a German state. While he never succeeded in a fraction of what his scheme anticipated, he did establish three more colonies, Frankentrost, Frankenlust, and Frankenhilf, which with their churches and schools have persisted until today. Incidentally, these colonies were a stimulation to others who founded colonies in the region. One example is Amelith.

Frankentrost was established on the Frankenmut model. But Frankenlust and Frankenhilf resulted from the use of Loehe's colonisation revolving capital which he had raised by loans and a personal contribution and which he planned to invest in land for successive colonies. Unfortunately, events in Europe and America interfered with the operations of the revolving capital. The general upheaval of 1848 checked the emigration of the type of person who was acceptable to or willing to go to the strictly Lutheran colo-



nies. The radical nature of the "Forty-eighters" antagonized the pastors of the colonies, since the latter were inclined to view monarchy as a divine institution. In the unrest Loehe and the bank in Nuernberg, which had extended a loan to him, grew panicky and drew back from the undertaking. Consequently, the first years of Frankenlust, established in 1848, were stunted and the colonisation plan was endangered. By 1850, however, immigrants appeared again. Thereafter, Frankenlust gradually moved forward. In the meanwhile without Loehe's recommendation the pastors of the colonies proceeded to stake out a tract for a new colony. Having recovered slightly from his fears Loehe, then, decided to experiment with colonisation as a technique for alleviating certain social ills of the average Bavarian parish in which impoverished young people were not legally permitted to marry.

This was the origin of Frankenhilf which was established in 1851. Here, again, Loehe had not reckoned sufficiently with the whirl of circumstances. To equip and settle poor people in the new world was a complicated task. Before any one could start farming there was a certain minimum of things required. Money had to be supplied for the purchase of land. Repayment of loans were destined to be tardy. In his efforts to secure favorable agreements with the shipping interests Loehe discovered that they did not have the same concern for the Lutherans as he. Furthermore, Loehe was not able to assume responsibility for the expenses of transportation in case the poor emigrants died before they had paid their debts to the companies. The revolving fund itself was never more than about twelve hundred dollars, and the poor frequently deserted the colony along the way, in the event an opportunity for earning money presented itself.

Loehe's doctrinal dispute with the Missouri synod concerning

the questions of the church and the ministerial office was temporarily pushed into the background in the early Fifties. Thereupon, Loehe redoubled his efforts in Saginaw county but in such a manner as to bring his work in Michigan to a speedy close. He had decided to erect a Pilgrim house in Saginaw City and open a school teachers' seminary. In the case of the former the day of its need had passed since the immigrants generally had enough friends in the valley to take care of them until they were settled, and the rise of East Saginaw City had replaced Saginaw City as the port of entry to the colonies. As for the latter it was an endless source of trouble because the director of the school had brought instructions from Loehe not to turn over the control of the property to the Missouri synod. Loehe had developed a definite dislike for the role of one who founded institutions in America only to lose control immediately as in the instances of the Frankenmut mission and the seminary at Fort Wayne. When in addition to the squabble with the Missouri Synod, which followed, he suggested the institutionalizing of Frankenhilf and the use of the funds derived from the land to help poor immigrants, a storm of protest arose in the colony which resulted in a split in the congregation. From all sides came the cry of European dictatorship.

It was time to take stock of things. Hundreds of Germans who were not Lutheran or even anti-ecclesiastical had poured into the region of the colonies. Non-Lutheran groups bought tracts of land adjoining the colonies. The English speaking colonists were coming into the region and blocked the expansion of the colonies in some directions. The rising price of land made a small capital increasingly less adequate for needs. While he generously respected the suggestion of the director of the school in Saginaw City that he buy a tract of land on the Tittibawasee for an enormous sum of

money, he had to tell the latter that the European Germans were no longer interested in America and were refusing to contribute to the cause.

From America came the advice that Loehe should move slowly in founding colonies and should make sure that the last one was sufficiently strong before commencing another. In no instance was he to coerce people into them. Furthermore, he was told that the American Lutheran church was not being served most usefully by sending faithful Lutherans to a few colonies when there were so many hopeful small congregations which needed to be strengthened. Another curious question was how the German colonies surrounded completely by the English were to serve as "light and salt" to the German Lutherans in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri.

The dispute about the school teachers' seminary and Frankenhilf became so bitter that the president of the Missouri Synod was asked to try conciliation. President Wynecen after futile attempts at making adjustments ordered the director of the school to seek a place for further activities in a region where the Missouri Synod did not operate. In 1853 several of Loehe's men left for Iowa and Loehe himself decided to transfer all his interests in America to the latter place. In his own judgment Loehe concluded that the colonization fund had fulfilled its purpose in so far as it made Saginaw county a gathering place for Lutheran immigrants.

After more than a decade of experimentation in America and after European Germans had lost much of their interest in America, Loehe began to concentrate upon the establishment of charitable institutions in his own parish of Neuendettelsau. In this latter phase of his work he was eminently successful for he founded almost a score of institutions. Concerning his undertakings in America he declared that they rarely resulted in what he had hoped to attain.



With the exception of Frankentrost the colonies were not, contrary to Loehe's wish, organized after the pattern of the German village. Gradually the number of divine services became less and less. A few English people pushed their way into the colonies. Germans in the midst of the English could only with difficulty persist in the allegiance to their German pledge. Increasingly the colonists felt the importance of knowing the English language as a safeguard to their material interests. At the outset Frankenmut attempted to maintain an English Indian school in a German community. The law of the state required that the English language must be used in the district schools, and, whenever, the colonies established schools they had to make provision for its use. Very early in the history of the colonies some leaders expressed the desire to know the English language in order that they might become better American citizens. And for the same reason they were determined to teach their children English as well as German. For the internal life of the colony, however, the German language prevailed. This at least was as Loehe wished it in that the German people were thereby guaranteed a sufficient body of German religious literature of every sort.

As a German community Frankenmut grew more rapidly than the other colonies, enjoyed a remarkable prosperity, acquired a reputation for being the outstanding township in Saginaw county, and exercised a major influence in attracting Germans to that section of Michigan. From its membership came some of the county's leaders. It is an excellent example of communal co-operation. Its schools have kept pace with the best in the state; its church has remained central in the life of the community. And even to this day Frankenmut has maintained a certain uniqueness in the life of the county.











